

ACTION NEA-00

INFO	LOG-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	DODE-00	PERC-00
	PDI-00	DS-00	OIGO-00	FBIE-00	VCJ-00	FSI-00	H-00
	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	LAB-01	L-00	MOFM-00	MOF-00
	M-00	VCIE-00	NSAE-00	OIC-00	GIWI-00	FMPC-00	SP-00
	SSO-00	SS-00	EVR-00	NCTC-00	R-00	ECA-00	DSCC-00
	PRM-00	DRL-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	FA-00	SWCI-00	/001W
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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5563

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 000803

FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA, AND NEA/PPD PAGNEW, INFO ECA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/13/2018
TAGS: [KPAO](#) [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: SAVING THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE CENTER

Classified By: CDA Maura Connelly for reasons 1.4 b and d

11. (U) This is an action request. See paragraph 6.

2.(C) SUMMARY: On October 28, the SARG directed the Charge d, Affaires to close the American Cultural Center (ACC) and the American Language Center (ALC). The ALC is the English teaching program overseen by the ACC. In response to the SARG,s direction, public activities at the ACC and English language classes at the ALC have been suspended. The closure of the ALC presents post with a dilemma: because the ALC must cover its costs and is operated by a grantee organization, it cannot remain closed for long without going out of business. Post requests guidance as to whether Embassy Damascus is authorized to explore possible means of preserving the ALC and asks the Department to work with Amideast to obtain their agreement to postpone closing down for as long as possible.
END SUMMARY

13. (C) While the "closure" of the ACC is manageable for now, and most of its work continues behind the scenes, the closure of the Language Center is time-sensitive and a cause for concern. Established nearly 20 years ago, the ALC is the leading institution for English instruction in Damascus and our major public diplomacy outreach tool in Syria. Over 9000 Syrians annually study English at the ALC, and it runs numerous training courses for Syrian teachers and businesspersons. Post funds English study at the ALC for a wide range of human rights activists through special grants. Over 200 Syrians, many of them SARG employees, receive post-issued scholarships to study at the ALC. The Language Center,s role in fostering American values through English study has been incalculable over the years, and it has provided a large pool of recruits for exchanges and cultural programs.

14. (C) The ALC is currently administered through a complex cooperative agreement (similar to a grant agreement) between post and Amideast headquarters in Washington. This arrangement relieves post of administrative and financial responsibility for the Center, which it would be impossible for us to administer directly. The present agreement took post,s PAO over six months to negotiate and implement. It is for \$1.6 million, funded by receipts from tuition and testing at the ALC.

15. (C) If we do not reopen the ALC soon, Amideast will incur unsustainable financial losses and will be forced to withdraw from our agreement, forcing the permanent closure of the Center. ALC,s closure would deprive us of one of our key tools for supporting the beleaguered human rights community in Syria, of our major public diplomacy outreach tool, and of a vital program for sustaining people to people contacts with the Syrian public.

16. (C) ACTION REQUEST: Post requests Department guidance on whether Embassy Damascus can explore means of persuading the

SARG to allow the reopening of the ALC in a reasonable time frame. We also request that the Department discuss with Amideast leadership their willingness to maintain the current arrangement - some losses notwithstanding long enough to engage the SARG. We would welcome the Department's exploration of any other possible avenues to maintain this vital public diplomacy tool.

CONNELLY